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ON

LITERATURE AND DOGMA:

An Inaugural Lecture,

DELIVERED IN

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BY

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ON THE OCCASION OF HIS INDUCTION AS PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC
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LITERATURE AND DOGMA:

A Lecture.

IN entering upon the duties of the office to which I have this evening been inducted, a multitude of thoughts struggle for utterance. The work to which I am called sustains the most intimate relations to the life and vigour of the Church. Revealed truth is God's grand instrumentality for the regeneration and sanctification of men. It cannot be unimportant that the future ministers of the Church should be able to handle it wisely and well. It is no light responsibility, therefore, to be called to unfold the system of divine revelation to their minds, so that in due time they may go forth with such a grasp of gospel truth, and such a perception of its relations to the human heart, that they shall, through God's blessing, be mighty in awakening the careless, in directing inquirers to Christ, and in comforting believers and moulding their life to the pattern of Christ's example.

The duties of this office, important at any time, are more than ordinarily weighty at the present juncture. The immense mental activity now directed towards religious questions, while sure ultimately to result in good, is certainly not free from present peril to the interests of truth.

Had the call to this work been ambiguous, the momentous interests bound up with it might have made me shrink from the undertaking. As it was, I had no alternative but to go forward, honestly endeavouring to serve God in this position, until He points to other work.

It is no affectation for me to say, that, while I have always felt a real pleasure in theological science, and a certain mental affinity for the work to which I am now called, I enter on my duties with

a deep sense of my unfitness to be enrolled among the honoured instructors who have taught in this College. And I cannot forget that the chair I am to occupy was held for many years by a distinguished divine who has left a deep impress on the mind of the Church. It is not for me now to become the eulogist of my teacher. But I would be untrue to my feelings, if I did not acknowledge my obligations to him, and false to my convictions, if I did not express the belief that for the pure, masculine, scriptural theology with which he was so largely instrumental in imbuing the rising Canadian ministry, he will long be justly held in grateful remembrance by the Church.

It falls to my lot to be the first *alumnus* of Knox College who has been honoured with a place in her professorial staff. The risk which a prophet encounters in his own country, will, I trust, in my case be in some measure compensated for by the *esprit de corps* which a Knoxonian may hope to evoke in his *alma mater*. It shall at least be my aim, with God's blessing and the cordial co-operation of my students, to achieve success, and to make it apparent that Knox College, which has already supplied half of the pulpits of the Canada Presbyterian Church, may not unfittingly do for herself what she has already so well done for a sister institution.

Instead, however, of dwelling on thoughts which my personal relations to the work and the institution naturally enough suggest, it may be more useful for me to call your attention to that branch of theological study which forms my special department, and to the baseless character of the hostility, more or less pronounced, which it frequently encounters in the present day.

I am required to teach Systematic Theology. There are two preliminary positions which every student who enters on this study is supposed to have reached. It is taken for granted that he has satisfied himself (1) that there is a personal God, the Creator and Moral Governor of the Universe; and (2) that God has made a supernatural revelation of Himself for our guidance, of which the Scriptures contain a trustworthy record. Whatever is necessary to establish or defend these positions, belongs to the

department of Apologetics, and is presupposed in Systematic Theology.

Possessing such a revelation, it is natural and reasonable for us to endeavour to ascertain the truths which it teaches, and to arrange them in their proper order, according to their internal relation and real connection. And if the truths of Scripture form a unity, it is right that we should present them in their harmony and consistency. This is the aim of Systematic Theology. It seeks to gather the facts and teachings of Scripture, and arrange them in their natural order and relation to each other as parts of one great system of truth. And when these teachings are examined, they are found to fall under the somewhat familiar but not very easily exhausted categories of "what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man."

Systematic Theology claims to be an *inductive* science. It is by the Baconian method alone that a reliable Systematic Theology can be reached. The physicist gathers his facts from the book of nature, the theologian from the book of revelation, but both should follow the same inductive method. Each must lay aside preconceived opinions and theories, and learn God's system. The one is the minister and interpreter of nature; the other is the minister and interpreter of God's word. Theology is true and wholesome in proportion as it is scriptural.

The human mind is so constituted that it cannot avoid arranging, in systematic order, facts which it accepts as true. We cannot help considering the relation which one fact or truth sustains to another in Scripture. We cannot think of salvation without embracing in our view the ruin to which man is represented as exposed. It is impossible to consider the person and the work of Christ entirely apart. No human intellect is so constituted that it can believe that a mere man can accomplish the work which may be reasonably ascribed to the God-man. The views which we embrace in reference to the purposes of God, necessarily lead to very definite conclusions in respect to many of the most important questions bearing on man's salvation. The views held on free will and grace, mutually determine each other.

No one who *thinks*, can fail to form for himself a more or less

fully developed system. The question is not really between system and no system, but between a system which is scriptural and true and a system which is unscriptural or one-sided. System men will have. In proportion as they think clearly, they think systematically. Even those who declaim against system, show most clearly that they have a system of their own.

The benefits which flow from such a grasp of the truth, as an adequate mastery of Systematic Theology implies, can scarcely be seriously questioned. The power which it gives in defending the truth, and the ease which it imparts in handling it for the practical ends for which God has given it, are a sufficient vindication of its utility. It is not, therefore, without good reason that this branch of study has always held such a prominent place among those deemed essential for candidates for the ministry in the Presbyterian Church. The genius of Presbyterianism demands for it, the place of commanding importance which it has always held among us. As a section of the Church of Christ, we have ever exalted the truth. And the Presbyterian student who imagines that any list of accomplishments, however valuable in themselves, will compensate for the want of clear and comprehensive views of divine truth, has strangely mistaken the genius of the Church to which he belongs, and the nature of the work for which he is preparing.

It must be admitted that Systematic Theology is, at present, in certain quarters, rather at a discount. The feeling may even have begun to invade our Church. Acting on the good old maxim, "*Obsta principiis*," it may be wise at once to challenge the intruder.

In many cases, the feeling to which we refer is the result of prejudices which will not bear a moment's calm reflection.

The rapid advancement of science and the spread of general knowledge inclines a numerous class to read more or less copiously on almost every subject, without taking the time and putting forth the mental effort necessary to reach clear and fixed opinions on any question. On most topics, their minds are always in a *nebular* condition, and they feel an instinctive antagonism to clear and definite statements. And the unpalat-

able character of many theological doctrines, no doubt, frequently does much, unconsciously it may be to themselves, to intensify this feeling.

Candour also requires us to admit, that the unintelligent dogmatism, with which the most momentous doctrines are often asserted and defended, has exerted a very unfavourable influence in the same direction. This unfortunate temper is not confined to any class of religionists. It blossoms luxuriantly in the arid wastes of Scepticism, as well as the garden of the Church of God. If it is found among those who accept without thought, and assert without reason, all the traditions received from the fathers, it is found also in its native hatefulness among those who swallow with unquestioning faith all the current unbeliefs and cavils of their little coterie, and then pour out like water, their unintelligent scorn upon all that is pure and sacred.

Even when the opinion advanced is true, it has never been assimilated into their thinking, or made part of their mental furniture. Whatever their dogmas may be to others, they are not to them living truth, but its *fossil remains*. And when a man who is expecting his neighbour to render calmly and intelligently a reason for his views, finds himself, instead, pelted with dead men's bones, dug from the graves of bygone controversies, it is no marvel if it fails either to sweeten his temper, or exalt his estimate of dogmatic systems.

The manner in which technical terms and abstract theological discussions are sometimes dragged into the pulpit, has helped to swell the current of prejudice. Doubtless all the truths of God's word should, in due proportion, be faithfully preached ; but it is not necessary to do this in the technical language of the schools, which the people generally do not understand. To do so may, with some, secure the preacher a cheap reputation for great profundity, but it is a sad affliction to those who are hungering for the bread of life.

The way also in which zealous theorists overstrain Scripture, to find support for a favourite view, makes a very unhappy impression on the sober-minded. Our standards recognise that not only what is expressly set down in Scripture, but what is

by good and necessary consequence deduced from it, is to be believed and taught ; but this gives no countenance to the way in which the sacred writers are often put upon the rack, to extort from their reluctant lips some testimony to a foregone conclusion.

None of these reasons, nor all combined, will bear careful examination, or supply any valid ground for the rejection of a well-compacted Scriptural Theology. They are rather among the influences which we may feel, than among the reasons which we can formulate or defend.

There are, however, objections to Systematic Theology, and to all fixed religious convictions, which, if equally unfounded, are not always so easily dissipated.

There is a philosophy abroad which knows not God, and which, consequently, can find no place for what man is to believe concerning God, or the duty which God requires of man. I do not refer to that metaphysical philosophy which, as its highest achievement, sends us to worship at the altar of an unknown God. Its high priests do not regard it as Atheistic in its tendency. It has even been employed so to define the limits of religious thought as to cast a designed rampart around revealed religion. It is true, Christianity has never taken kindly to its defender, but of this philosophy we do not speak.

We refer rather to those systems, Atheistic and Pantheistic, which deny that there is a personal God, or assert that there is no evidence of his existence. These views manifestly render impossible the acceptance of any supernatural revelation, or any definite doctrinal system founded upon it.

These anti-theistic philosophies have largely tainted the atmosphere of modern literature, and many who avowedly reject them, are unconsciously led, by their indirect influence, to assume a semi-hostile attitude towards all theological systems.

Even James Anthony Froude has not escaped the infection. In his "Short Studies on Great Subjects," he has a paper on "The Prospects of Protestantism." These, as painted by him, are gloomy enough. Mistaking a change in the manifestation of life, for a loss of vitality, he sees in Protestantism, everywhere, the

signs of decay. And the radical error to which he traces this unhappy condition of things among the followers of the Reformation, is their foolish adherence to *dogma*, in questions upon which we can know nothing. And among the questions of which we can know nothing, it is not obscurely hinted, will be found the Articles of the Athanasian Creed, the decrees of God, justification by faith alone, and the eternity of future punishments. He tells us that "religion may be separated from opinion, and brought back to life." "For fixed opinions on matters beyond our reach, we may exchange the certainties of human duty." (Page 147.) In other words, the only way things can be mended is by abandoning doctrine and pursuing morality. More than one hundred years ago, Moderatism made known and employed this wonderful panacea; but we have yet to learn that religion was by it "brought back to life." Froude is by no means sanguine that this happy revival of practical religion is likely soon to occur. His only hope for the future—and it is faint—is that the laity will take the matter into their own hands, as he says they did at the Reformation. With delightful frankness he tells us: "I have no hope from theologians, to whatever school they belong. They, and all belonging to them, are given over to their own dreams, and they cling to them with a passion proportionate to the weakness of their arguments." (P. 147.)

Now, although this learned historian might ascribe our views to theological passion, or the weakness of our arguments, we will venture to affirm that Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Calvin, Cranmer, Latimer and Knox, the men who gave impulse, direction and success to the Reformation, were not *laymen*, and that those who in England well-nigh strangled the Reformation at its birth, and gave to the Anglican Church the composite character, in part iron and in part miry clay, which it retains to the present hour, were not *theologians*. Yet we doubt not, there are those who will be carried away with the foolish prejudice to which this brilliant writer has lent the sanction of his name.

Another author has recently devoted himself more formally to the demolition of all doctrinal systems. He has given to the world, under the title of "Literature and Dogma," a volume which

is intended to lay the axe to the root of all theology. His objections to all doctrinal teaching are so radical, that if their validity is admitted, the theologian may acknowledge that his occupation is gone. It may not be improper on this occasion to examine his views more carefully.

The levity and banter frequently indulged in by this writer, might have absolved us from giving any very serious attention to his production. But this very peculiarity may make it more attractive to some readers. It must also be allowed that there are not wanting in it the evidences of an under-current of earnest thought, and the marks also of very considerable study, directed towards the great themes which are discussed.

This author thinks that Christianity, which has stood for eighteen centuries, is in danger of perishing through the encrustations of dogma, which the subtlety of theologians has gathered round it. The Bible contains an element which is very valuable, and which he is anxious to rescue from the peril to which theology has exposed it. Hence his volume. Matthew Arnold appears in the character of a defender of the faith. His method of defence is peculiar. It reminds us of nothing so much as of the traveller fleeing with his family over Russian steppes from the wolves, and who, while urging on his horses in their headlong race, throws out first one child and then another to his hungry pursuers, until, at last, bereaved of all, gloomy and solitary, he reaches a place of security, and looks around and asks himself, What is there now left to me? Matthew Arnold comes to save the Bible, and he does so by throwing to the wolves everything it contains which could not have been found in Seneca or Epictetus.

He starts with the assumption that the existence of a personal God cannot be verified. His words are, "Now, the assumption with which all the Churches and sects set out, that there is a great personal First Cause, the Moral and Intelligent Governor of the Universe, and that from Him the Bible derives its authority, can never be verified." (Page 9.) "But this preliminary assumption," he adds, "governs everything which in our current theology follows it." (Page 9.) He forms a very correct idea of the importance of this initial assertion. He tells us, "It is no use beginning lower

down and amending this or that ramification, such as the Atonement, or the Rezi Presence, or Eternal Punishments, when the root from which they all spring is unsound." (Page 269.) The figure which regards the branches as lower down than the root, may be rather inverted, but the meaning is sufficiently plain and undeniable. If there is no personal God, all theological doctrines are disposed of at once.

Arnold does not object to the use of the word *God*, but he declares that, "for science God is simply the stream of tendency by which all things fulfil the law of their being." (Page 61.) But how near this wise man, who calls "the stream of tendency" God, comes to the fool who says in his heart there is no God, it is not difficult to perceive. As the existence of a personal God cannot be verified, the Bible cannot derive authority from Him. It is a mere human production, and is to be treated accordingly. It is not, however, to be thrown away as useless: it contains much which is of priceless value. Certain nations, as well as individuals, make contributions to the culture and well-being of mankind, superior to what is given by others. To the Greeks we go for the fine arts, to the Romans for law, and to the Hebrews for religion. They had, in fact, a natural genius for religion, which makes their literature very valuable to us. It must, however, be read with discrimination.

We must discriminate, in the contents of the Bible, between what can be verified and what cannot. We must also distinguish between what the Scriptures teach, and the popular views entertained of their meaning among the sects. In trying to understand them, they blunder egregiously. They proceed, he tells us, on the assumption that the language is *scientific*, whereas it is "fluid, passing and literary."

"It cannot," he says, "be repeated too often that what is called orthodox theology is, in fact, an immense misunderstanding of the Bible, due to the junction of a talent for abstruse reasoning with much literary inexperience." (Page 164.)

How are we then to make successfully this twofold discrimination? It is by *culture*. It would be vain to look for wisdom to a God who is only a stream of tendency. All

that remains for us is to cultivate and make the best of our powers.

For this end some have recommended the study of physical science, but Matthew Arnold, being a literary man, thinks there is nothing like literature. Read extensively and wisely, and you will gradually learn to estimate what you read at its proper worth. In acquainting oneself with the best which has been thought and said in the world, the judgment forms itself insensibly into a fair mind, and we are able to discern between things that differ, and see the best of everything and lay the rest aside.

With this apparatus in possession, he turns to the Bible, and we need not be surprised if such an one as he can divine.

He discovers that the Old Testament is filled with the word and thought of *righteousness*. It is, in fact, its master word. No people ever felt like the Hebrews, that conduct is the main thing in life. But he would not have us imagine that conduct has anything to do with God. "Eating, drinking, ease, pleasure, money, and the intercourse of the sexes, the giving free swing to one's temper and instincts—these are the matters with which conduct is concerned." (Page 42.)

In reply to the objection that this is only morality, he informs us that religion is only morality touched with emotion. In order to gain this emotion we must dwell on rightness of conduct, and have it constantly before us, until it fills the mind and kindles emotion within us.

Culture now makes another advance. A people deeply attentive, like the Hebrews, to right conduct, could not help discovering the very great part in righteousness which belongs, we may say, to *not ourselves*. (Page 51.) We did not make ourselves, or our nature. We did not establish the connection which undeniably exists between happiness and right conduct. There is much in conduct which depends on *not ourselves*.

With that nice discernment which culture gives, he is able to discover that the *not ourselves* which at the time the books of the Old Testament were written, weighed on the mind of Israel, was the *not ourselves* which makes for righteousness, and whence we find help to do it. He is careful to exclude from his *eternal*

not ourselves, all idea of a personal being, who loves righteousness and hates iniquity. "Israel had not yet begun to speculate. He personified, indeed, his Eternal, for he was strongly moved, and an orator and a poet." (Page 55.) "The real germ," we are assured, "of everything in Israel's religion which in time becomes clothed upon by a mighty growth of tradition and poetry, was a consciousness of the *not ourselves* which makes for righteousness." This is all that can be *verified* in the Old Testament!!!

But as this does not by any means exhaust the contents of the sacred books, he feels it necessary to explain the presence of other elements, which, in course of time, were added to confirm the original belief that, "to righteousness belongs happiness."

In the dark days of Israel, when wickedness seemed to prevail, in order that their wavering trust might hold fast the grand belief that the *not ourselves* makes for righteousness, they imagined to themselves a coming Messiah who would restore all things, and cause rectitude to triumph.

In like manner, when it became difficult for them to expect the prevalence of righteousness in this world, they conjured up to themselves the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, and of a future state, where all wrongs will be righted. This element, which occupies the greater part of the Bible, he calls *Aberglaube*, or extra-belief. It is something which cannot be verified. It is a kind of fairy tale which a man tells to himself, which, if it cannot be disproved, can as little be proved certain to turn out true. (P. 87.)

When he comes to the New Testament, he discovers that Jesus Christ is not the Messiah of prophecy, "but Christendom has with perfect justice made him the Messiah, because he alone took, when his nation was on another and false tack, a way obscurely indicated in the Old Testament, and the one possible and successful way, for the accomplishment of the Messiah's function—to bring in everlasting righteousness." At a time when the Jews attended chiefly to outward acts, "Jesus taught them that religion is inward and personal." It was by insisting on the inwardness of religion, and enforcing mercy and humbleness as elements in

righteousness, that his ministry became so powerful in producing right conduct.

We are informed that, while the Apostles and immediate followers of Christ largely imbibed his spirit, they soon allowed imagination and fancy to add to the simple teaching of the Master a whole train of extra-belief, including "a phantasmagorical advent of Christ, a resurrection and judgment, Christ's adherents glorified and his rejectors punished everlastingly." (Page 107.)

Our author, as the result of his examination of the Old and New Testaments, discovers that the *residuum* which can be verified, is, that to right conduct belongs happiness, and that the *not ourselves* makes for righteousness. This is the grand *Catholicon* of literary culture to overcome sin, make men religious and renovate the world !!!

It is not necessary that we should answer this volume in detail. The statement of its views is to all ordinary minds a sufficient refutation. But even for those who are inclined to look at the principles which it involves more carefully, a minute examination of all its positions is needless. The whole theory of it is built on a few leading *assumptions*: when these fall, the entire theory necessarily falls with them.

1. The first of these is, that Christians generally, especially in constructing their systems of theology, regard and treat the language of Scripture, as *scientific*, whereas, he assures us, it is "fluid, passing and literary." Hence he asserts, that "orthodox theology is an immense misunderstanding of the Bible."

If this position can be sustained, all existing theologies are worthless, and we must begin our induction of what the Bible teaches *de novo*.

It might be supposed that an author making such assertions, would have felt it incumbent upon him to single out some of the leading doctrines of theology, and show, by a careful examination of the text of Scripture, that they are not taught by the Bible. This is not done.

Now, leaving out of sight, for the present, the epithets *fluid* and *passing*, whose force, in this connection, we do not profess to understand very clearly, we may say that Arnold's unproved as-

sumption is the very opposite of the truth. Theologians and ordinary Christians do not regard and treat the language of Scripture as scientific. No respectable authority can be quoted in support of that idea, while authors without number might be mentioned who assert the opposite. And there is, moreover, no exigency of theological systems, which should tempt theologians to treat the language of Scripture as scientific.

We may also assert, with equal confidence, that they regard and treat the language of the Bible as *literary*. Literature embraces many different styles of composition, each of which can be employed to convey clear and distinct ideas of truth and fact, and each of which should be interpreted according to its own laws—poetry as poetry, prose as prose, parables as parables, historical narratives as history, and statutory enactments as laws. It is admitted that mistakes may have occasionally been made both as to the nature of a given composition, and the laws, or the application of the laws, for its interpretation. To err is human. But to assert that divines, either designedly or habitually, treat the language of the Bible as *scientific*, is to make an affirmation “which cannot be verified.”

The inspiration of Scripture does not destroy the literary character of the language. No one surely can dream that the language of a composition ceases to be literary, because it is free from mistake.

Are we then agreed with Matthew Arnold on the interpretation of Scripture? By no means. He tells us that the language is not only literary, but *passing* and *fluid*, and *fluids* are proverbially *unstable*.

His real object in insisting that the language of Scripture is not *scientific*, but *literary*, is to prove that the Scriptures do not teach definite truth, or fact, beyond what we can verify by our *experience*. And, of course, we can have no certain knowledge of God, or of the mysteries of redemption. We can never get beyond observed *phenomena*.

This position can be maintained, only if it can be shown that the language of common life and literature which we find in the Bible is unable to convey truth clearly and definitely. This no

man believes. When I assert that grass grows, the sun rises, all men die, I do not use the language of science, but I affirm facts which no scientific nomenclature can make more certain.

There seems to underlie much of Arnold's writing, the notion that for knowledge to be *partial*, is the same thing as for it to be *unreal* and *uncertain*. No object in the physical universe is known fully; does it follow that we do not know their existence? I am very far from knowing fully the brother with whom I have lived from childhood; does it follow that my knowledge of his existence, acts and character is unreal?

And, although we cannot know the Almighty perfectly, we can know the meaning of certain definite Bible statements respecting him. When it teaches that he is just, kind, true, holy, or when it proclaims him the living God, its language conveys as clear and definite ideas as when it applies similar terms to men. And it is not honest and fair interpretation, which regards the language as fixed and certain when spoken of men, and *fluid* when applied to God.

2. It is assumed that the existence of a personal God cannot be *certainly known*, or *verified*; that, "for science, God is simply the stream of tendency by which all things fulfil the law of their being." (Page 61.)

In reply to this assumption, we may say, that the existence of God is a fact which has verified itself to mankind, in the only way in which a truth of the order to which it belongs, can be expected to make itself known. God has never submitted himself to the inspection of our senses, "but the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead."

"No science," says Hooker, "doth make known the principles on which it buildeth." The existence of God is a fact, from which and not to which we reason. In other words, it is known *intuitively*. The knowledge of it is due to our constitution, and not to any process of reasoning. Made as we are, and placed where we are, the conviction springs up of its own accord, without the intervention of proof.

We do not claim that the full Christian idea of God is ever reached save by the aid of revelation, but that there is a Superior Being on whom we are dependent, and to whom we are responsible, is known by mankind, "because God hath showed it unto them."

This belief will stand the tests by which intuitive truths may be verified. It is a *necessary* and *universal* belief. These *criteria* need not be considered separately, for the universality, in the case of this belief, can only be accounted for by the fact that it is *intuitive*, or *necessary*. History abundantly testifies, that in all ages the belief in a Superior Being, on whom we are dependent and to whom we are responsible, has been characteristic of mankind, and observation establishes the same fact in reference to all nations in the present day. The idea of God is also impressed, so far as we are aware, on all languages. The belief in God is as distinctive of man, as reason, sight or hearing.

It is objected that tribes have been discovered by travellers and missionaries who had no idea of God, and that certain classes, such as the deaf and dumb, have been found, previous to instruction, in the same condition.

We reply (1), That isolated cases of this kind, if fully authenticated, no more prove that a belief in the existence of God is not a necessary and primary conviction of mankind, than isolated cases of idiocy and blindness prove that reason and sight are not characteristics of the race.

We answer (2), That it is by no means certain that the cases alleged are examples of the absence of the idea of God. They have not been sufficiently authenticated and enquired into to warrant us in reasoning from them. The Christian idea of God is so high, as compared with that cherished by degraded savages, that we can easily see how a traveller, with a defective knowledge of the language and a very cursory acquaintance with the people, might fail to discover anything which he could recognise as the idea of God.

It is objected also that there are many professed Atheists, and, therefore, the belief in God cannot be intuitive. But men also deny the reality of their own bodies, and the validity of the dis-

inction between right and wrong. But, while under the influence of a theory, men make such denials, they show that, in reality, they believe as other men do. They resent wrongs done to them, and exercise care over their bodies just as others. And in like manner, when death or some great trial reveals the real under-current of the Atheist's convictions, we see very clearly that he knows and feels that there is a God.

But the question may be asked, Is it a personal God in whom men universally believe? or is it merely a "stream of tendency," or something "*not ourselves?*"

The answer to this question depends on two things: what we mean by *personality*, as ascribed to God; and *what is involved in the intuitive belief that there is a God*. We remark:

(1.) All that theology means when it calls God a person, is that he is a self-conscious agent, one who has "intelligence, will and individual subsistence." Or, to put the matter in a simpler form, when it ascribes to him personality, it means that he is that which, when speaking properly says I; when spoken to, is addressed as Thou; and when spoken of, is called Him.*

(2.) Now, let any one examine his intuitive belief that he is dependent on God, and responsible to him, and he will at once discover that his sense of responsibility and dependence can only be cherished towards a being who has intelligence, will and individual subsistence—a being whom we can address as *Thou*, and think of as *Him*. No man can feel responsibility to a "stream of tendency," any more than to a river or a mountain.

(3.) In order to obviate a mistake into which it is strange to find an intelligent writer falling, we remark that it is not necessary to imagine that all who believe that God is a person, or that all who have convictions, or employ language which admits of no other explanation, have defined to themselves the idea of *personality*. It may surely be assumed that mankind, generally, believe in the personality of their fellow-men, and constantly use language which admits of no other explanation, while not one in a hundred can tell wherein personality consists. When, therefore, Arnold says,

* Vide C. Hodge, "Systematic Theology," p. 524.

"Israel did not scientifically predicate personality of God, he would not even have had a notion of what it meant," he asserts something which is quite irrelevant as proof, that they did not regard and treat God as a person.

We presume there are hundreds of Englishmen who know the author of "Literature and Dogma," who do not scientifically predicate personality of Matthew Arnold, and many of them would not even have a notion of what it meant.

3. It is assumed that while the idea of *God* is uncertain and indefinite, that of *morality* is clear and certain.

He informs us that "*morality* represents for everybody a thoroughly definite and ascertained idea—the idea of conduct regulated in a certain manner. Everybody, again, understands distinctly enough what is meant by man's perfection—his reaching the best which his powers and circumstances allow him to reach." (Page 39.) That which makes the ideas of morality and perfection definite and certain is that, unlike the idea of God, they are "drawn from experience."

In reply to this assumption, we maintain—

(1.) That the ideas of morality and perfection are not drawn from *experience*. If, therefore, the ideas of morality and perfection have no other foundation, they may be dismissed at once into the region of *Aberglaube*.

Arnold's reasoning proceeds upon a philosophy which we regard as radically unsound. It is based on the philosophy which teaches that we can know only phenomena, and as phenomena can be known only by experience, all real knowledge is due to that source.

Look at the case before us. It is quite evident that experience may *occasion*, but it cannot be the *source* of that idea of morality which we all possess.

When an act comes before us, for the first time, which involves a moral element, the mind pronounces judgment upon it with as much confidence as if it had been repeated an hundred times.

And experience can, at best, only make known the moral quality of past acts. It cannot pronounce on the morality of similar acts which lie in the future, so as to lead us to shun, or follow

them according to their character. Experience cannot bridge the gulf between the past and the future.

But to our moral judgments this gulf is obliterated. I observe an act for the first time, and my moral nature pronounces judgment, not simply on that one act, but on all similar acts, past, present and future. There is more in the judgment than in the experience : *the experience is limited, the judgment is universal.*

Every man, therefore, who has moral convictions by which he can guide his future conduct, has something which experience may have *awakened*, but which it *never gave*.

The confidence which we have in the uniformity of nature, and in the perpetuity of moral distinctions, is due to intuition, and not to experience. And we may add, that if intuition gives us the idea of morality, it may give us also the idea of God.

It is enough, however, for us to know that the knowledge of morality by which Arnold proposes to direct our conduct, can only be attained in a way which he repudiates, and which is subversive of his whole system.

We answer—

(2.) That the ideas of *morality* and *perfection* are no more *fixed* and *definite* than the idea of *God*.

If morality is "conduct regulated in a certain manner," the manner in which it should be regulated is not always clearly ascertained and definite. The standard in England and in India is not the same. It is morality in India—even "morality touched with emotion"—for mothers to throw their children into the Ganges to be devoured by the monsters which infest the sacred river.

And, if perfection is for a man to reach "the best which his circumstances and powers allow him to reach," the question still returns, what is the *best*? And Mr. Arnold will scarcely affirm that the same answer would be returned in Athens and in Jerusalem.

It will be found, moreover, that the ideas of morality and perfection vary almost exactly, as does the idea of God. It is true, there is something in common in the ideas of morality and perfection found in all lands, but it is equally true that there is some-

thing in common, in the idea of God which prevails among all nations. And when the Greeks raised to Olympus, heroes whom we would consign to the Provincial Penitentiary, it is no better evidence that the idea of God is uncertain and indefinite, than that the idea of morality is variable.

It is not necessary for us to pursue our examination of this volume farther. The entire argument by which the writer designs to overthrow Dogma, and annihilate Theology, is based on three assumptions which we have seen are groundless. These assumptions pervade and vitiate all his reasonings. And, when the baseless character of these assumptions is made apparent, the superstructure erected upon them is necessarily destroyed.

When a man enters on a work requiring delicate powers of discrimination, under the control of an overmastering *bias*, we need scarcely be surprised at any opinion he may form, or at any conclusion he may reach. The only thing which can be predicated of him with moral certainty is, that his judgments will not be warranted by the grounds on which they profess to rest.

Such appears to us the unfortunate position of Matthew Arnold. He sees everything through his false assumptions, and each object must needs take the hue of the medium through which it is viewed.

This all-controlling bias seems to account for almost everything which is distinctive of the book. The only element whose presence it does not explain, is the small *modicum of truth* which it contains.

It certainly supplies the only intelligible explanation of the manner in which he deals with the Old Testament.

It may be questioned whether a book was ever written in any language which, in such varied and unmistakable forms, proclaims the *personality* of God. From the first verse in Genesis, which declares God the Creator of all things, to the last verse of Malachi, which closes the Ancient Canon with the words of warning,—“lest I come and smite the earth with a curse,” the divine personality shines through, in every chapter. It is not in poetry alone, but it is seen in plain history, and in unimpassioned legal codes. The Decalogue, in terms cool and clear as the lines with which

they were traced on the tables of stone, proclaimed it with a distinctness never surpassed in the fervid poetry of Isaiah. But the author of "Literature and Dogma" can see no recognition in all this of the divine personality, nor any evidence that God was to Israel more than "the stream of tendency by which all things fulfil the law of their being!!!"

And when it is said, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord," this author, with that *culture* which "knows the best that has been thought and said in the world," discovers that they had "no idea of the unity of God,—they merely meant to say that while there are many aspects of the *not ourselves*, Israel regarded but one aspect of it only, that which makes for righteousness." (Page 56.)

And when the Psalmist says, "It is a good thing to sing praises unto our God," this author, with that admirable tact and discrimination which literary culture imparts, discerns that "*God* is here really, at bottom, a deeply moved way of saying *conduct* or *righteousness*." "Trust in God is trust in the law of conduct." (P. 65.)

We cannot sufficiently admire the perspicacity of vision which springs from that culture through which "the judgment insensibly forms itself into a fair mind." It is scarcely equalled by the eye of the lynx, which, upon the high authority of Erasmus, is reported to see, even in the densest darkness, *that which does not exist*. We would, however, have been glad had our author completed the achievements of culture, by informing us what Moses meant to teach, in the first verse of Genesis, whether, that in the beginning, it was the *law of conduct*, or "the stream of tendency by which all things fulfil the law of their being," that created the heavens and the earth!!

The assumptions which underlie the reasonings and assertions of this volume account for so small a residuum of truth being discovered in the Bible.

Accepting such principles as axioms, a writer must have little skill if he cannot discover in the Bible just as little as he desires to find. If the words, in their common grammatical and literary sense, teach an unwelcome truth, he has only to recal the fact that the language is *fluid*; and if even this spell should not prove

potent enough to conjure away the disagreeable fact, he has only to ask, Is it verified by experience? and whisper *Aberglaube*, and it is done.

Not the least remarkable thing about this book is, that the author should have deemed it necessary to write a volume to show that the Bible teaches in a reliable manner, what might be found in almost any heathen moralist. He goes to the Hebrews for religion; but when we discover all that he has *verified* of their teachings, we are quite at a loss to know why he might not with equal propriety have gone to the Greeks or Romans. They certainly believed that "to right conduct belongs happiness," and that the "*not ourselves* makes for righteousness." This is all he can verify in the Bible; all the rest is "a kind of fairy tale which a man tells to himself."

There is no living God who watches over us with unslumbering eye and loving heart—no incarnate Saviour, no atoning Sacrifice, no Divine Spirit to enlighten and renew the heart, no immortality, no judgment to come, no authoritative revelation of truth and duty!! It leaves us "without God and without hope in the world." All that remains to us is a little bald morality, detached from everything which makes it possible. To those oppressed with a sense of sin and a conviction of their weakness, its message is, See to your conduct, be good, do your duty; for to right conduct belongs happiness.

If this is the gospel of literary culture, we are profoundly thankful that it is not the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

We have heard of a worthy Canadian minister who once discoursed on the text, "He was a good man," under three heads: I. Be good; II. Be very good; and III. Be sure that you are very good. Matthew Arnold's Bible would form a homily of the same order.

He still adheres to *morality* as something fixed and certain. This is about the only thing in his book for which his assumptions will not account. He cannot go quite so far as his principles would carry him. He scouts the notion that knowledge may come from intuition. It is only from experience that it can proceed. What cannot be verified by experience is a mere extra-belief.

We have seen that the idea of morality and moral obligation do not come from experience, and consequently a logical application of Matthew Arnold's principles will sweep away the morality, just as surely as the doctrines of the Bible. Indeed, accepting, as he does, the fundamental principle of Hume's philosophy, it is not easy to perceive how he can stop short of universal scepticism.

This book, like many more written in the same spirit, will disappoint its author. He evidently has a comfortable sense of the strength and vigour of the blows which he strikes at historical Christianity and doctrinal theology, but they will survive his assaults. He seems to imagine that his clever *brochure* will make sad havoc upon established beliefs and Bible doctrine.

He appears to be one of those birds who, when he rubs his beak against the vast temple of historical Christianity, thinks that he is overturning its foundations; but long after the bird shall have become carrion, the temple will stand where it has stood in the ages past.

We turn from this volume with two convictions greatly strengthened:

1. That doctrinal Christianity and the Bible are inseparable. The rejection of the former involves the practical rejection of the latter. When theology perishes, the Scriptures will not long survive. If Matthew Arnold has left us no Bible worthy of the name, it is because no method less radical could eliminate the obnoxious dogmas.

2. That the foundations on which Systematic Theology rests, remain secure.

Nothing has been adduced which need trouble the faith of any one who does not mistake unproved assertions for established truth. We can still rest assured that there is a personal God, the Creator and Moral Governor of the Universe. We can hold without misgiving that in the Bible we have the trustworthy record of a supernatural revelation which God has made for our guidance.

And while these two facts remain incontestable, an open field and a rich reward invite us to the study of Systematic Theology.

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